

ANNAMITE CIVILIZATION

Vith no direct bearing on the office in view. It took a lifetime's efforts of memory to retain the Chinese classics and their commentaries. This system was borrowed from the Chinese and introduced in all its elaborate detail into Annam in the twelfth century. It consisted of three progressive degrees culminating, by a process of ferocious elimination, in the triennial examinations held at Hue over which the Emperor himself presided. Out of twelve hundred candidates only two hundred and fifty could become Bachelors of Arts, and from twelve to fifteen Masters of Arts. The many who failed to qualify swelled the ranks of the malcontents who were always ready to revolt against the existing order. This system had many admirable features: it was democratic in selection and rationally tolerant in subject matter. But Confucianist education ignored the world and bred in its students a verbose formalism and complacent pedantry akin to that of the mediaeval scholastics. Absolutism in the government was paralleled and upheld by an intellectual despotism exercised from birth, by and through the educational system, upon administrators and people alike in support of the existing order. The lack of a vital national culture resulted in a complete spiritual stagnation, which was the heavy price paid by Annam for China's moral domination.

Military mandarins were not chosen in the same way since their eligibility depended upon physical prowess and a vague knowledge of Chinese military tactics. But a literary examination was also required for the highest ranking officers. The Confucianist ideal was perpetuated in Annam that the military were inherently inferior to the civil authorities, so that the latter took precedence over their military colleagues of

even the same rank. Both civil and military mandarins were divided into nine classes of two degrees each. The basic characteristic of the whole mandarin is the exercise of all powers without specialization because, by delegation, they partake in varying degrees of the Emperor's universal authority. This sacred origin makes the mandarin's person inviolable: his miniature seal of state is the symbol of his authority. These privileges, as ever, breed certain obligations: the mandarin may never leave his official residence or district, nor may he acquire property or marry therein. Decapitation, exile, or demotion were the different penalties he might pay for the abuse of his large powers. On the rare occasions on which the mandarin was visible to his people, he was accompanied by an awesome retinue, preceded by a guard of elephants, and sheltered in a palanquin by parasols, his badge of office. He could not be approached without ceremonial prostrations, or *lays*,